

SRO: single room occupancy

by

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on
January 17th, 1997 in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science in Visual Studies.

ABSTRACT:

During August of 1996, I stayed in a series of SRO hotels in New York City leaving a book and diary behind when I checked out of each room. The books that were left in the rooms differ from one room to the other but all contain events and/or situations that could have happened in the very room. Diary entries were left behind between the pages of the books, like bookmarks, to indicate the appropriated passages and to impose my story onto the book's story.

SRO, single room occupancy, refers either to an entire hotel or to a room within such a hotel. SRO's are the most inexpensive type of hotel. For social workers the term "SRO" has come to mean a single room occupant - not the building but the person. These cheap single room hotels have been an element of American urban life for nearly two hundred years. Nevertheless, they have been the target of an official war within city development, neighborhood gentrification, initiated by people whose concept of "home" does not include the SRO with its accommodations of single rooms or suites, usually without kitchens and often with shared bathrooms. Few, if any, housing alternatives for these residents exist. When owners close a building, tenants are lucky if they can find a worse hotel at a higher rate.

Myths circulates about today's hotel residents: all are supposedly all friendless, isolated, needy and disabled; all are presumably socially marginal; all are mildly psychotic; all are transients who never live anywhere for more than few months. I knew these myths were not entirely true. After all, I had lived in those hotels for quit a while before I start doing this project. SRO hotel is a valuable cultural alternative to mass media culture and to utopian notions of middle class and homogeneous life for everyone. I was inspired by this alternative life style. And this alternative was an opportunity to explore this situation further to investigate larger culture. Just to live the life I was living when I lived in those places and to let the project emerge. I was reading books and writing diaries, but instead of keeping the books and diaries I would leave them, and instead of staying in one place I would move from hotel to hotel everyday.

The end product is a narrative structured by physical, psychological and chronological movement through the city. The narrative takes an injection of a foreign body (urban space and its situations) in order to be constructed. The poetry of now is bred in the public space of the city.

**Thesis Supervisor: Dennis Adams
Title: Associate Professor, MIT Visual Art Program**

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P a r t O n e

P r o j e c t : D i a g n o s i s

SRO: "single room occupancy" refers either to an entire hotel or to a room within such a hotel. SRO's are the most inexpensive type of hotel. For social workers the term "SRO" has come to mean a single room occupant - not the building but the person.

November 1st 1992 was the day that I first came to live in an S.R.O. in New York City. My initial decision to live there was based largely on my circumstances at the time: I had been evicted from my home earlier that year and I was drifting from friend's place to friend's place. It was getting increasingly difficult to move and I was exhausted from all the niceties. I asked this guy I often talked to at the hospital to find a cheap hotel and share the room. His name was Herbert Huncke, a gray eminence and mentor of the streets to the writers of the Beat generation.

Allen Ginsburg, spoke about Herbert Huncke,

As far as I know the ethos of what's charmingly hip and the first pronunciation of the world itself to my fellow ears, first came consciously from Huncke's lips; and the first information and ritual of emergent hip subculture passed through Huncke's person.'

Huncke surfaces as a character in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, William Burroughs' *Junkie*, and John Clellon Holmes' *Go*. And there at the hotel room we shared, usually very late at night before we slept, he often told me stories. Filled with fascinating encounters with everyone from fellow thieves and drug addicts to poets and artists, Huncke's stories, whether verbal or written, always remained as ad hoc prose - provincial and awkwardly literate. Burroughs once said,

Huncke's prose always proceeds from his midnight tongue, that is, literal story telling, just talking, and for that reason it always remains both awkward and pure.'

Huncke was a philosopher of the streets. Human nature was his subject, and he approached it with sympathy and penetration. He was a keen observer of street culture. In the 20's, he walked the streets of Chicago all night long. These all-night urban walks became a habit which he continued into his late seventies. He often told his friends and the literary crowd

1. From a conversation with the author.

2. From a conversation with the author.

how his late night urban loitering had always been the catalyst for his production, namely writing and storytelling.

I remember Huncke used to talk fondly of the SRO's that he stayed in during the forties and fifties. He was especially fond of the Earls and Broadway Central which collapsed in the early seventies. He told me the story that some unconscious wino surfed down the collapsing floors while passed out in a cast iron bath tub...or a woman with no legs was working at the front desk, and when Candy Darling was sneaking a young Huncke into the joint, the old hag used to yell "you can't bring that kid in here, he's too young" Candy would haughtily reply, "just try to stop us, fossil face."

Mainly, I just miss those late night talks with Huncke. The moments I enjoyed most were early mornings, sometimes listening to him, sometimes enjoying the silence between us as the city sound of morning activity became foregrounded. Listening to the echo of his voice by the candlelight in the confinement of the tiny hotel room we shared, there was something pleasant or blissful in the experience of urban horror tales of cryptic hotels not unlike our own; an excess of precision triggered an uncanny sense of coincidence. And it was in these moments of quiet reflection that the true Huncke would emerge: tender, gentle, exquisitely sensitive, accepting of all that his life had become, and of what lay ahead. It was the gift of now...

~ ~ ~

During August of 1996, I stayed in a series of SRO hotels in New York City leaving a book and diary behind when I checked out of each room. The books that were left in the rooms differ from one room to the other but all contain events and/or situations that could have hap-

pened in the very room. Diary entries were left behind between the pages of the books, like bookmarks, to indicate the passages that I appropriated to the rooms and to impose my story onto the book's story.

I came to realize something that I didn't realize when I was actually living in those hotels. That is, how fragile both these places and the occupants within them are. These cheap single room hotels have been an element of American urban life for nearly two hundred years. Nevertheless, they have been the target of an official war within city development, neighborhood gentrification, initiated by people whose concept of "home" does not include the SRO with its accommodations of single rooms or suites, usually without kitchens and often with shared bathrooms. The lives of SRO residents inextricably intertwine with these downtown hotel buildings. Some residents literally cannot live without them. Joe on the Bowery mentions,

The way I work now is I collect cans. I got all these cans. (he holds up a large garbage bag bulging with them). I got two other bags stashed in my hotel. It's not a regular hotel, they call it a hot line. To get in, you have to wait in line all day, till 3:00. They are pretty bad, but I know the real bad ones and I stay away from 'em. I know a guy, a working-class guy, works with rent-a-cars, and lives in one 'cause housing is so expensive in this city. He works but he's homeless.³

Few, if any, housing alternatives for these residents exist. When owners close a building, tenants are lucky if they can find a worse hotel at a higher rate.

3. From a conversation with the author

In his book, *Living Downtown*⁴, the first comprehensive social and cultural study of life in American cheap hotels, Paul Groth discusses the fragile situation that surrounds SROs and their occupants.

As the hotel stock dwindles, the option of moving evaporates, and tenants move to the street, or these days, to the tunnels. The street option has become evident. The closing of a 100 room hotel means that perhaps 150 more people may be living on the streets.⁵

and he continues to say

Hotel residents and buildings are real enough, but they stubbornly remain outside of public awareness. Not surprisingly, two of the path breaking books of the 1970's on SROs have the "unseen" and the "invisible" in their titles.⁶

Ira Ehrlich, a New York observer, summarized the problem in direct terms.

Single room occupants are omitted in the language of housing legislation, written off in the minds of communities, ignored and rejected in urban development plans, and pushed from one area to another on the waves of fluctuating real estate markets.⁷

~ ~ ~

On the situation of SRO hotels and their relation to street culture, Blade, a manager of the one of the hotels I stayed in located in Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan, pretty much sums it up from his own experience. His experiences are twofold: as the manager, it is his job to imple-

4. Berkley. University of California Press. 1994.

5. *Ibid* p.10

6. *Ibid* P.11

7. Ira Ehrlich. *The Invisible Elderly*. St Louis University Institute of Applied Gerontology. U.S. Senate Special Committee on aging, Single Room Occupancy. p.40.

ment the landlord's politics, which often includes taking action - whether eviction or harassment - against tenants. But he also lives in the hotel that he manages, so as a tenant, he is subject to the same deteriorating conditions that confronts all individuals living in SRO hotels.

Once well-kept, the hotel had been in decline for years, long before Blade became its manager. Little or no repairs had been done during the sixties and seventies. In time the hotel took in more welfare recipients than working straight johns⁸. By the early eighties, it had earned itself the reputation of being one of the city's worst hotels. Lax security and the landlord's indifference to the type of clientele frequenting his building made it an arena for muggings and burglaries. As the word spread, drug-dealing, the selling of bootleg wine, gambling, and loansharking became established trades in and around the building.

Blade says:

Before I came to this hotel, I was working in a hotel in Times Square. My title was clerk, and I made money by renting rooms to prostitutes. They would want a room for five or ten minutes, and I would make about three hundred dollars a week in addition to the regular salary.

The only trouble I had there was when I got stuck up twice in one night. Four men with guns robbed me of the hotel's money, but they didn't harm me. And another time I walked in during a hold-up. They must have been addicts or something because they cut me up badly.

I left my job at the hotel in Times Square and came here. When I got here, the building was in good physical condition, but it was a real bad hotel just the same. There were a lot of muggings, murders and things like that. The tenants used to tell me that when they came home late at night there would be strangers loitering around outside the building. They would follow a tenant into the elevator and rip him off. The hotel was also a known narcotics haven. When a partner and I took over the building as managers, we made sure that one of us was in the building around the clock.

People still use and sell narcotics in the building, but if there are

8. Basically all mail (including checks) are delivered to the hotel front office. If rent or any other money is owed, the manager can hold the tenant's check until the tenant lets the manager cash the check and take out the amount owed.

any robberies they're done by people from the building, not by strangers.

The landlord has really let the building run down. He has a low opinion of the tenants. As a matter of fact, he has a low opinion of anyone on welfare. But he wanted welfare people in the building because he felt welfare monies are pretty reliable because you know what day the check will arrive and how much. He would take advantage of the tenants who couldn't count. He would lend them a dollar or two each day until they got their check and if the bill came to twenty he would take forty. I asked him how he got away with it and all he said was, "What can they do about it?"

The last time I bought oil for this building here's what happened. We needed oil but the landlord wouldn't buy any. I had five hundred dollars from collecting rent. I said, "The hell with it," and took the rent money and bought the oil. The landlord came by that night and wanted the money. I told him what I had done, and he came at me with an ax. Because the landlord wouldn't buy oil, the tenants didn't have any heat or hot water for three winters. The city ordered the tenants to pay only one dollar a month rent until the landlord collected hundreds of violations he had on the building. Today was check day and the landlord came by even though he can't collect rent any longer. There are still a couple of checks that he steals. One Spanish lady can't speak any English; so on check day he cashes her check for two hundred dollars and gives her ten singles every week. To her it looks like a lot of money. He keeps the rest. The landlord also cashes welfare checks of tenants who have died or who don't live here anymore. See, the landlord breaks the law but he does it in a way that his hands remain clean. He hasn't paid me any money in a year.

There are a lot of squatters, too, besides the registered tenants. The fourth floor is loaded with transvestite whores who bring their johns up and rob them. Nobody here has a job; they (the tenants) are either hustling or collecting welfare, or both.

Two of the regular tenants, Sonny and Shorty, have stolen all the brass and copper pipes from the building. The landlord used to pay them not to steal pipes but they steal them anyway.⁹

9. From a conversation with the author.

Old-age, alcoholism, addiction and mental illness are labels that apply to some tenants of SRO hotels; but not all. The following comment by Seville; ex-tenant of many SRO hotels, illuminates some of the reasons for urban nomads staying in SRO hotels.

When I first came to New York City, I got a job. I was twenty-three and not a baby anymore. I worked in a leather factory, but after a week I lost the job. I wound up living in the subways and what have you.

I was advised to get on welfare. I did. I got a room at the hotel 21 on 21st street. That only lasted a short while. When I went out to the bathroom in the mornings, the men in the hotel would sometimes annoy me, and who needs that?

I moved down to East 8th street to an old apartment tenement. It was awful. Later I took a place in a vacant building on 3rd street and Avenue B. One day I just walked out. I figured I wouldn't be any worse off living in the streets. During this time my welfare case was shifted to someone else, and I didn't get a check for about five months. I couldn't find out what was going on. During this time I was living on about thirty dollars a month. This was in the summer.

I started making some money on the side by selling drawings and collages that I had made. I moved to a little hotel on the corner of 23rd street and 11th Avenue called the Last Stop. But I was always short of money and behind in rent. The manager got mad at me and made an issue of the dogs that I kept as pets, even though people above me had dogs as well.

The rent was thirty dollars a week - no refrigerator, no bathroom. The manager wanted me out. The day I left it was raining and freezing. I slept on a friend's floor that night. I left most of my belongings behind.

That week I looked around the neighborhood. A door of a small warehouse on 11th Avenue was open. I walked up a few steps and opened another door. I looked around, explored a little, and found a landing blocked off a few flights up, apparently vacant. I set up housekeeping and lived there for the next couple of months with only a few interruptions. I bought a sterno stove and candles. By that time I had started to collect SSI.¹⁰ My check was delivered to a mailbox in a check cashing place. In my new home nobody

10. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. SSI checks are issued monthly in one lump sum to cover rent, food, clothing and all other expenses.

complained about how many dogs I brought home or what I did. Nobody said anything.

There was a wino who slept on a landing a few floors down a couple of times. One time I came in and found he had appropriated my blanket that I had found on the street. When it got cold outside, it got cold inside. In fact, sometimes it seemed colder inside. I just slept in all my clothing.

I had a shopping cart that I brought books and pencils and things in with. I tell you, I had a home there. By the time I was through, I had it set up pretty well. I called it Mila Eighteen, after a building in the Warsaw ghetto where the resistance had set up and organized in a cellar.

I tried to come and go when I wouldn't be too conspicuous. I'd walk my dogs early in the morning, before any workers come to the warehouse, and in the afternoon, after the hot dog man who stood by the exit door went away. Sometimes, I would stay in when the weather was bad.

On cold nights, I used one of my dogs as a pillow while another one huddled around my legs, which kept me warmer. I sat by the sterno stove in the morning while I had my espresso. I want you to know, I lived! I lived man. I stored my groceries on the steps. During the day I would make drawings or collages or wood sculptures to sell on the streets. I had a little table and I took my things around the Village.

So passed winter into spring. I found another dog or two or three. Nobody said anything or bothered me about it.

Around February, I finally got tired of it all so I moved to the Hotel Alfred, where I had a good room with a good lock on it. When I saw a rat peering at my garbage one day, I went back to Mila Eighteen with my dogs.

As the weather got better, I would try to get out early in the morning and just stay out. Have some coffee, feed the dogs, and go out. Sometimes, I would cook eggs for myself before leaving; otherwise I would pick up a doughnut at a store.

I took a sponge bath at different places, different rest rooms. I'd go to different centers for potluck dinner. I spent a lot of time at the Barnes and Noble. It was like a library where you could spend hours and hours.

That summer, I met someone who was living in a rooming house on Eighth Avenue near 23rd Street. Most of May and June I stayed there. Then I lived a couple of months at a place on 51st Street. I

lived in a Y-shaped hallway. My room was on the stem of the Y. The room across from me, at the point of the Y, was used by a couple of prostitutes. One night I overheard them planning to rob a customer. The guy came up. Later there was an argument. He claimed she robbed him and she denied it.

There was a lady a couple of doors from me who was robbed. She was a middle-aged woman who worked all day. She lost her radio and a clock. The doors and locks weren't very good. I didn't have anything worth stealing but it started to make me nervous.

Finally I got a room in the Hotel Redway. My rent was twenty-three dollars a week for a room that I could reach across. The bathrooms were run-down but the showers worked. I finally bought a cheap radio which is all I really have. Someday, I would like a better radio or perhaps a cheap record player.

I lived there from July to December last year. I moved because I was beginning to feel closed in. I wanted to be able to pace the floors a little and not have someone yelling in the hall or worry about some character making wise cracks at the door. I wanted a little more privacy for the money I was paying. I wanted more freedom. I'm a sucker for dogs, stray dogs, and I wanted to have a little more room to have a few more dogs. I also felt I needed more room to make the items I've been selling. I try to keep making drawings and collages, even if I only make them as gifts. I had very little room to work, and I would make a mess and smell up the room when I did. I had a hot plate, but I hated to use it in the little room. I hated to cook a hamburger or fry anything and have that grease splatter all over everything.

The place I have now is an apartment. I have three little rooms instead of one. I'm still in the middle of painting and fixing up the place so it will look like something. I bought my own bed for this place and a cheap chest of drawers. The tub is in the kitchen and the john is in the hall. Would I love a stand up shower!

I get two hundred and twenty-eight dollars from SSI. It's enough for me. I don't drink, I don't smoke. I do spend a lots of money at the vet though. That's why my clothes looks so bad. This month I finally bought a fifteen dollar pair of pants and a seventeen dollar shirt.

I kept pushing off making formal appointments at clinics. I tried to analyze myself and just work through it my own way. You remember that song in Fiddler on the Roof "I Am Laughing with Tears"? I don't think a very strong person would go to pieces as

much as I do... I get messed up, and start putting things together again, then I get messed up again. I always wanted to have a dog, and now I'm knee deep in them.

In my apartment now I get the sunlight . I love to get the sun. I only get a few hours of heat in the morning and evening, but that's all I really need. The only trouble I've had has been with a neighbor when I first moved into the place with my big dog. I wonder if he gave her a shaking up and made her worry for her own safety. And thereby hangs another tale, literally."

- - -

Seville is an artist/intellectual who actually prefers a nomadic life style. He literally cannot live any other way. But this is by no means an atypical gesture. Strolling through the city or "urban roaming" has been a recurrent attitude and motif among literary and artistic practices from Romanticism, to Dada and Surrealism, to the Situationist International, Fluxus, Conceptual Art and more recent strategies of intervention in the public sphere. This phenomenon of urban strolling and loitering was coined *flânerie* in the 19th Century and *dérive* in the 20th Century. The avant-garde is never anything but a progression. An emancipated form of past culture. Today emerges from yesterday.

- - -

Charles Baudelaire wrote a most elaborate depiction of the flâneur in his essay "Painter of Modern Life". Baudelaire's poet leaves the terror and the comfort of domestic privacy and dives into the spectacle of the public.

ii. From a conversation with the author.

...to be away from home and yet to feel home anywhere, to be at the very center of the world and yet to be unseen of the world."¹²

...For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite."¹³

For Baudelaire, the man who lives in a box, or the stationary man, is actually incomplete: The struggle for existential completion and satisfaction requires relentless bathing in the multitude of the crowd. The hero of modern life is he who lives in the public space of the city."¹⁴

~ ~ ~

In the early 1950's, International Situationist introduced a modified concept of the *flâneur* to post-war avant guard practice. They called it *dérive*.

In 1953, the situationist Ivan Chtcheglov, in his essay "Formulary for New Urbanism", claimed that one should seek to discover new mysteries through systematic drifting in urban space. Chtcheglov named this drifting *dérive* and argued for a new type of urbanism that would allow for new zones of play and experimentation. Guy Debord, a central theorist of the Situationists, further elaborated the concept of *dérive* in 1955 as a "fugitive encounter of various atmospheres"¹⁵ while aimlessly drifting in a city:

Among the various situationist methods is the *dérive* [literally: 'drifting'], a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *dérive* entails playful-constructive behavior and an awareness of psychogeographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of journey and stroll.

12. Charles Baudelaire. *The Painters of Modern Life*.

13. *Ibid*.

14. Kieth Tester. from the introduction to *The Flâneur*. (ed) Kieth Tester. London. Routledge. 1994; P.5.

15. Christel Hollevoet. "Wandering in the City" in *Power of the City. The City of Power*, New York. Whitney Museum of American Art. p.32

In a *derive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of terrain and the encounters they find there. The element of chance is less determinant than one might think: from the *derive* point of view cities have psychological relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.*

As Debord notes above, the *dérive* must be distinguished from "classic notions of journey and stroll." Also the *dérive* is not simply an updating of the Baudelairean *flâneur*. They are both "out of place", neither bourgeois nor proletariat.¹⁷ But whereas the *flâneur*'s ambiguous class position represents a somewhat aristocratic attitude (a position adopted by the bourgeoisie), the person on the *dérive* consciously attempts to suspend the notion of the class and thus enables the experiment to allow for heightened receptivity to the "psycho-geographical relief" of the city and to contribute to the sense of *depaysément*¹⁸, a characteristic of the ludic sphere.

For the Situationists, however, the *dérive* was distinguished from *flânerie* primarily by its critical attitude toward the hegemonic regime of modernity. The *flâneur*, unlike the participant of *dérive*, was an exclusively masculine type. The *flâneur* is characterized by a detached, observing gaze: "The *flâneur* symbolizes the privilege or freedom to move about the public arenas of the city observing but never interacting, consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze...The *flâneur* embodies the gaze of modernity which is both covetous and erotic."¹⁹ It is precisely these class and gender-specific privi-

16. Guy Debord. "Theory of *Dérive*" trans. in *Situationist International Anthology*. P50

17. See Walter Benjamin. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt. trans. Harry Zohn. New York. Schocken Books. 1968; p. 172-73.

18. *depaysément* is a term often found in early Situationist writings on the *dérive*. Literally, it means taken out of element or misled. The Situationist use of the term seems to be in the same sense that Levi-Strauss calls anthropology a "technique du *depaysément*" in his essay "The Concept of Archaism in Anthropology" (in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf [New York: Basic Books, 1963] p.117 and 118) as the translators of this essay note, the term refers to "the conscious cultivation by the anthropologist of an attitude of marginality toward all cultures, including his[sic] own." The same attitude is cultivated by the person on *dérive*." from the note on *depaysément*, Thomas F. McDonough, "Situationist Space" in *October* 67. Cambridge. MIT Press. 1994.

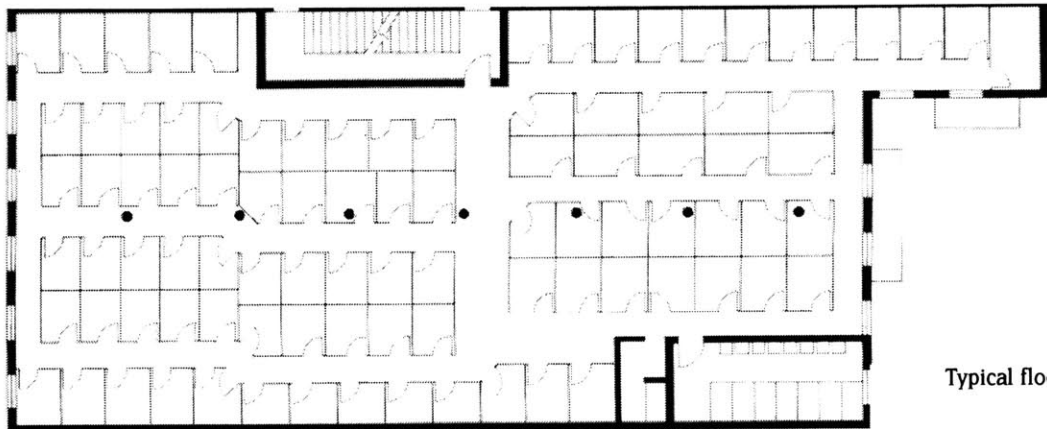
19. Griselda Pollock. *Vision and Difference*. London and New York. Routledge. 1988. p67

leges that the notion of the *dérive* critiques in its refusal of the controlling gaze. And as a result, the city and its quarters emerge as "social constructions through which the *dérive* negotiates while at the same time fragmenting and disrupting them."²⁰

During August of 1996, as I mentioned earlier, I stayed in a series of SRO hotels in New York City leaving a book and diary behind when I checked out of each room. A hotel room - an individual's home - can be as small as 4'x7'. The furnishings are almost always meager. A narrow bed spans the length of the room; an arm's length away, a cheap locker occupies what space is left. There is no space for a closet. The few clothes the tenant owns hang on hooks on the wall. There's no ceiling in the room, instead, a piece of chicken wire is placed on top of the walls. The cubicles offer no windows, a toilet for every fifteen to twenty men, and a shower for every sixty. Some of these hotels are hideously large, containing as many as two thousand cubicles.

For over the last twenty-five years, the supply of residential hotel rooms has not met the demand. In about 1970, as the supply of such hotel rooms rapidly evaporated, reporters began to write about a situation they called the "SRO crisis". Former hotel residents joined the homeless, occupying the streets and city shelters. In part, the present crisis results from misconceptions about who currently lives in these hotels and has its roots in a cultural amnesia about this alternative downtown housing life style. Myths circulates about today's hotel residents. They are all considered to be friendless, isolated, needy and disabled; all are presumably socially marginal; all are mildly psychotic; all are transients who never live anywhere for more than few months. I knew these myths were not entirely true. After all, I had lived in those hotels for periods of time before I started doing this project. The SRO hotel is a valuable cultural alternative to middle class identities as it is formulated through mass media culture. It provided a framework to explore both my own poetics and larger cultural issues. And in making this exploration I was determined to use Huncke's example as a

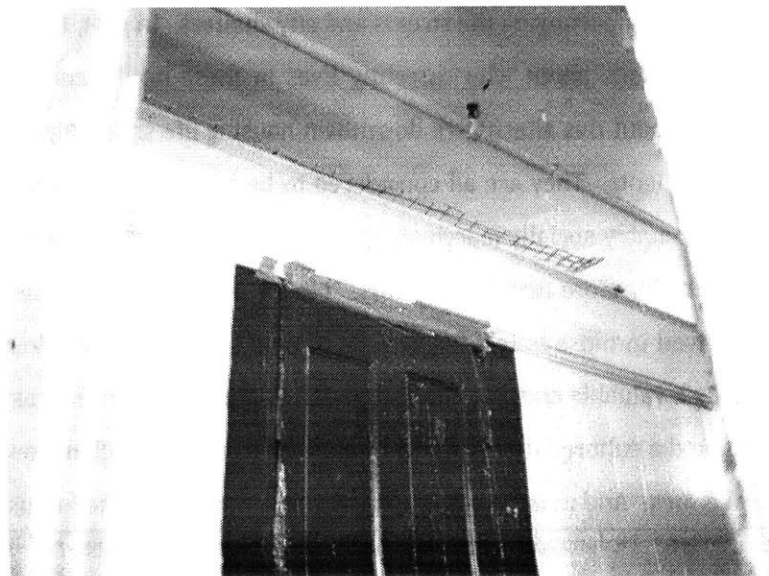
20. Thomas F. McDonough. "Situationist Space" in *October* 67. Cambridge. MIT Press. 1994; p.73.



Typical floor plan with
cubicles.



Hallway of Hotel Sun, Hester st.
NYC.



Exterior of a cubicle,
Hotel Providence. Bowery st. NYC.

model. Just to live the life I was living when I stayed in those places and to let the project emerge. I was reading books and writing diaries, but instead of keeping the books and diaries I would leave them, and instead of staying in one place I would move from hotel to hotel everyday.

I didn't have a set schedule or a list of hotels. Their selection was based largely on chance encounters. I would walk around the different neighborhoods where one is most likely to find such hotels. These periods of drifting and idleness, represent one of the most crucial moments in my process of the production; those were the times when my stories (represented as diaries in the project) were being constructed. Moreover, when seen in sequence from the first hotel to the last, the selection is what constitutes the structure of this project. By careful examination, I hope the project constitute some sense of *narrative*²¹ from the seemingly arbitrary order of the sequence. Roland Barthes says "...what I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again."²² My journey from hotel to hotel is presented as an urban nomadic narrative in a document which follows this essay. Its text is braided, woven in the most personal way, where strands of "life" and strands of the text, are interwoven, and where reading and the risks of real life are subject to same anamnesis. Life creates the structure or rather, the rhythm, and the rhythm creates the meaning.

The selection of the books is crucial. Their appropriateness to the rooms is carefully examined: neighborhoods around the hotel, the size of the room, the type of furniture and their placement, the smell of the room, the sound and noise from the street and the other rooms, the direction of the window and the view from the window are all considered and questioned. Sometimes when I cannot think of any book that can be appropriated to the room I check out the next morning without leaving one. The books that I left in the rooms are as follows:

Manual J. Torres. *Manny: a criminal addict story*

21. *The Pleasure of the Text*. trans. Richard Miller. New York. Hill and Wang. 1975.

22. I will discuss this issue at the end of this essay.

Hubert Selby JR. *Last Exit to Brooklyn*
Alexander Trocchi. *Cain's Book*
Herbert Huncke. *The Evening Sun Turned Crimson*
Jack Black. *You Can't Win*
Raymond Chandler. *Pick-Up on Noon Street*
James Mills. *The Panic in Needle Park*
Jim Thompson. *Nothing More Than Murder*
Davis Goodis. *The Moon in the Gutter*
Charles Jackson. *The Lost Weekend*
Jim Thompson. *The Grifters*
John Clellon Holmes. *The Horn*

These are classic texts of American hardboiled crime fiction written between 1945 to 1962. Aside from the obvious suggestion of memory and history that they embody through their objecthood, I employed these texts because they mirror the context of SRO hotels and the lives of their occupants. Still considered low-brow and throwaway, this specific genre of fiction remains marginal to mainstream literary criticism, and at the same time, it suggests a class-based separation between writers who have the status of literary artist and those who have been relegated to the status of literary workers.

Regardless of subjective notions concerning what constitutes "intellectual" writing or the tenuous relationship that exists between popular literature and literary criticism, this hard-boiled writing has been marginalized precisely because it is a lower class literature. Yet marginalization has, in turn, provided a perspective from which to reflect and critique society... as it has done for those who occupy the SRO hotel.

The diary entries that were left between the pages of the books as bookmarks not only indicate my presence, but act as intermediaries between the fiction (the books) and the non-fiction (the history of the occupants). And while this notion of intermediary, of agent, sets up the situation for an intimate one to one communication between myself and the next occupant of the room, it is my hope that these entries will provide them with a sense of warmth and support.

I am using the books to create a moment in which the borderline between fiction and non-

fiction evaporates - a moment of intoxication...the effect of "Being-on-Drugs" in which drugs are replaced with literature. Literature has always been associated with drugs and their effect - as sedative, as cure, or as escape conduit. Baudelaire assimilates intoxication into a concept of "work". The books put one to work on a whole mnemonic apparatus. Intoxication prescribes a method of mental labor that is responsible for braiding fiction and non-fiction. The books are gifts to an unknown individual who happens to occupy the room after I do ... a gift to weave fiction and non-fiction. But, is giving possible?

Is giving possible? Is it possible to give without immediately entering into a circle of exchange that turns the gift into a debt to be returned? In his book, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*²⁴, Jacques Derrida attempts to make out a paradox at the most fundamental level of a gift's meaning; for the gift to be received as a gift, it must not appear as such, since its mere appearance as a gift puts it in a cycle of repayment and debt.²⁴

Bataille says,

A gift does not mean anything from the stand -point of the general economy; there is only dissipation for the giver. Moreover, it appears that the giver has only lost. In the general economy of gift giving, not only does he have a power over the recipient that the gift has bestowed on him, but the recipient is obligated to nullify that power by repaying the gift. The rivalry even entails the return of a greater gift: in order to get even the giver must not only redeem himself, but he must also impose the "power of the gift " on his rival in turn. In a sense the gifts are repaid with interest. Thus, in general, the gift is the opposite of what it seemed to be: to give is obviously to lose. The gift would be senseless if it doesn't take on the meaning of acquisition; thus giving becomes acquiring of power.²⁵

But one wouldn't be able, by himself, to acquire power constituted by the relinquishment of power: If one destroys the object or gives a gift in solitude, in silence, no sort

24. Ibid.

25. Georges Bataille. *The Accursed Share. vol.1.* trans. Robert Hurley. New York. Zone Books. 1991. p.70

of power results from the act. There is nothing for the subject but a separation from the power without compensation. But if one gives or destroys in the presence of another person, the one who gives has actually acquired the power of giving or destroying. One is rich for having ostentatiously consumed what is wealth only if it is consumed.

With regard to this project, *SRO: single room occupancy*, the artist or the protagonist who leaves a book in a hotel room, who leaves a gift to an unknown individual who happens to occupy the room after he does, exists only in his diary which he inserts between the pages of the book that he leaves. The giver in this case is not visible but is not wholly anonymous either. This gesture, which is executed from a position between anonymity and visibility, acquires greater "wealth" and "pleasure" than that normally acquired by the traditional gift giving strategies presented above. As Bataille notes in his essay on the general economy, "In a sense, the authentic consumption ought to be solitary."²⁶

- - -

I start to think of Herbert Huncke once again. He was a great teacher, but at the same time lied constantly, or used people mercilessly to satisfy his drug habit and to quench his feeling of loneliness. But at the same time, I always found Herbert gave more than he took, he was free with his knowledge and possessions, the few that he had. The wealth of life cannot be measured by how much and what you have, but how much and what you give. In his last years he was surrounded by young artists, writers, film makers, poets and youth of every description. For the final six months of his life the door to the room 828 at the Chelsea Hotel was never locked. People came and went as they desired. Herbert sat and talked life stories. When he told a story he relived it.

26. *Ibid* p.70.

People gave Herbert support, be it money or food, and Herbert gave each person a crafted gift for their ears only: the stories and the knowledge he had accumulated living a life of "poverty". He had listeners. Many of them immortalized him and his stories in their literature, films and photographs.

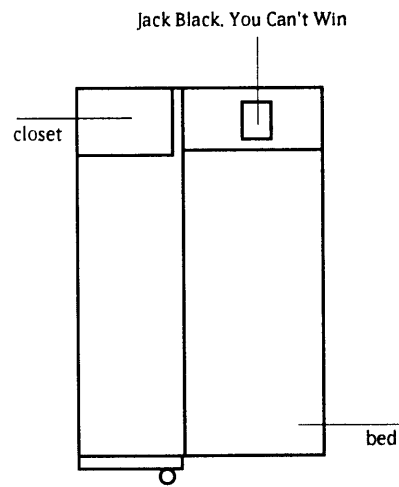
And such is the life of a story teller...

- - -

P a r t T w o

P r o j e c t : D o c u m e n t s

Hotel Sun
138 Hester street. NYC. 10002.



the room is approximately 4' X 7'







Jack Black. *You Can't Win*
Amok Press. 1st ed. 1988. New York.

He came in ten minutes after me, without knocking, and locked the door softly. "Now, kid," he said in his best manner, "we will proceed to estimate the intrinsic value of our takings in dollars and cents. That amount, divided by four, will give us an idea of what we have earned this evening."

"Why divide it by four, Sanc?"

"Because it's crooked and no fence will give you more. It's a great game, Kid. The fence divides it by four, taking seventy-five per cent of the value to pay him for the chances he takes. The loser, reporting to the insurance company, multiplies it by four to pay himself for the extrinsic value of his junk, and the annoyance caused by his burglar."

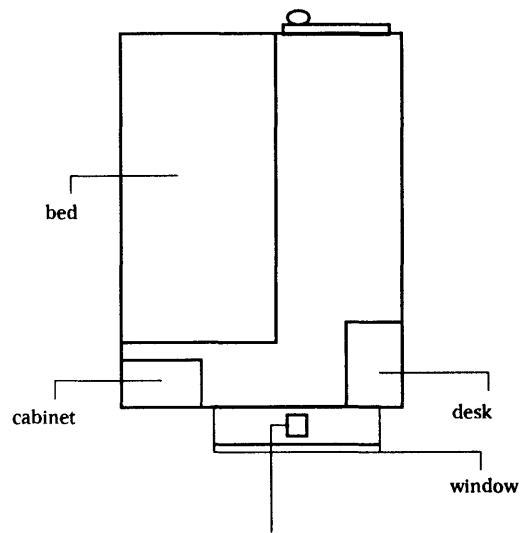
"So I am for Salt Chunk Mary's in the morning. She's righter than a golden guinea and is entitled to make the profit on the junk. I'll be back in ten days."

"While I'm away take it easy and don't go around the residence district at all. You can make the safety box about ten o'clock in the morning and four in the afternoon every day. You might locate something from there. Here's something else you can do."

"Every afternoon go into some good hotel and pay for a room for the night. Register from out of town. When you get the key, go out to your own room and make a duplicate of it. Mark your duplicate so you can identify it, and plant it somewhere. Most of the best places are using these spring locks now and you can't do anything without a key when there's a sleeper in the room."

the book I left,
author calls it
"You Can't Win."
and I wonder
who can?
winner takes nothing

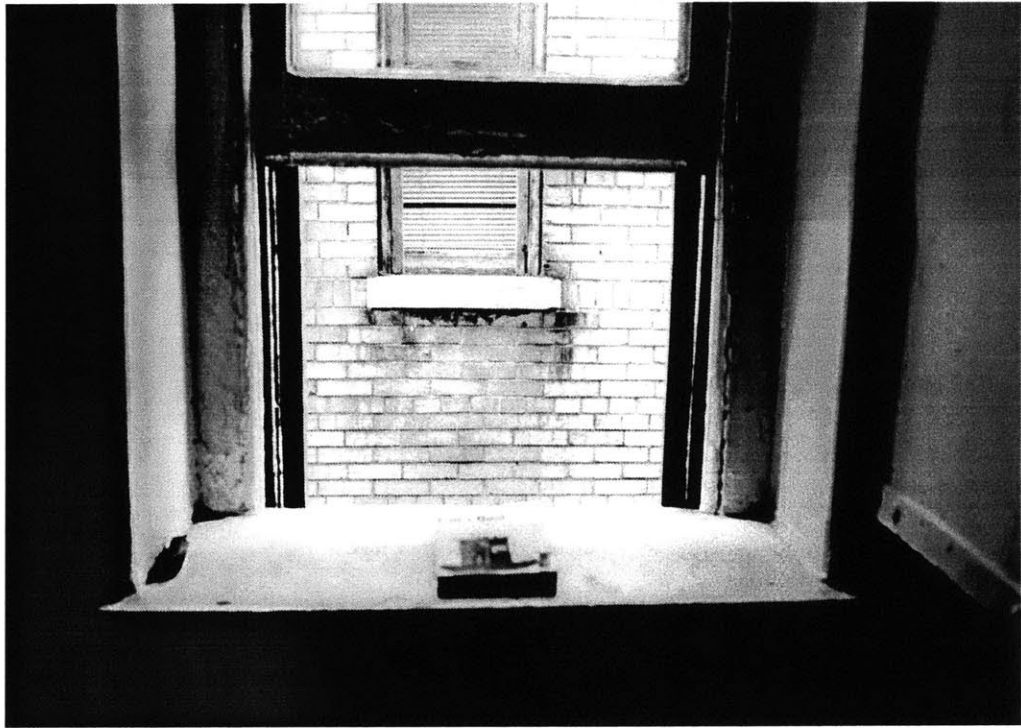
Hotel Riverview
113 Jane street. NYC. 10014.



Alexander Trocchi. Cain's Book

the room is approximately 6' X 8'





Cain's Book

by Alexander Trocchi

The greatest article
on a dope addict's life.
By Alexander Trocchi



Alexander Trocchi. *Cain's Book*
Grove Press. 1961. New York.

Geo is balding and he combs his blonde hair forwards, slightly oiled. His face has the battered look of an ex-boxer's. At thirty-three he is deteriorating; he is preoccupied with disappearing muscle. He watches, horrified, fascinated, the insectal movement of his private decay. And he massages the flesh which fascinates him with witch-hazel. Thinking brings a pained expression to his face and he is afraid.

We talked about how the world was just a conglomeration of rooms, other people's rooms, to wander about in. For ever and ever. For where our kind made a room the fuzz came, like something out of the movies, with drawn revolvers. It was like being at the mercy of a gang of belligerent children. We composed songs:

*Where the buzz is
there the fuzz is
comin through the door.*

*Where the fix is
There the dix is
comin through the floor.*

There was soon something between us. There were moments beyond all disbelief of good generosity. And I like the flaring of his paint, an abstract of Van Gogh's, but simpler. A yell in paint.

I returned to Geo's bed and lay down on it.

This hotel triggers sweet but also bitter taste in my mouth.

I used to live here.

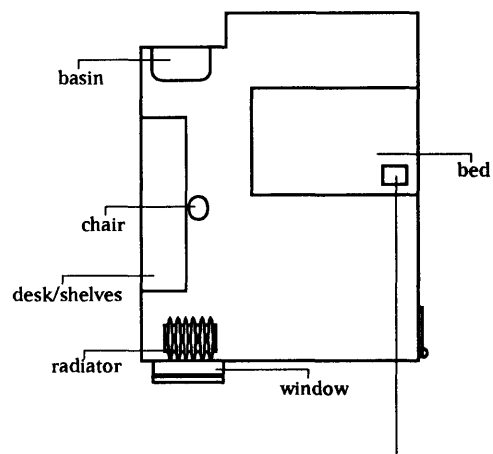
I used to live in a top floor in an octagon shaped 800 sq ft room with floor to ceiling windows on three sides facing west side highway and hudson river.

They called the room "Tower".

Today I'm staying in a room on a 2nd floor.

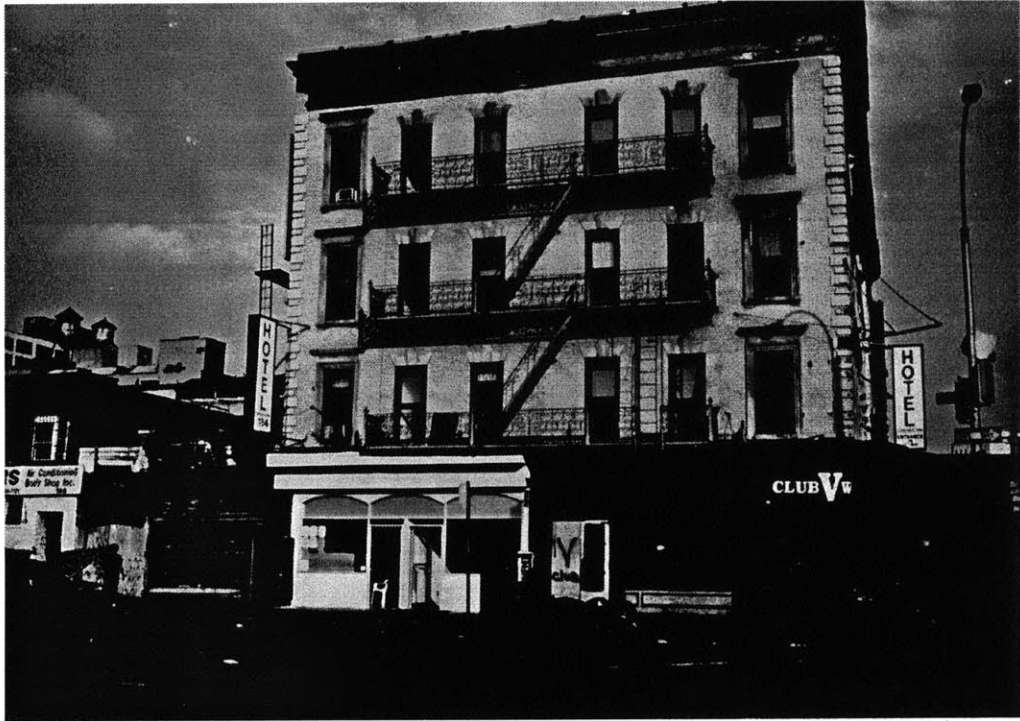
... I'm lying on a bunk. I hear the buzz of fly and notice it is worrying dry corpse of another fly. I wonder about it and then wonders where my attention drifts to next. A few minutes elapses during which nothing of the room. I hear the buzz again. And I wonder if it's me it wants.

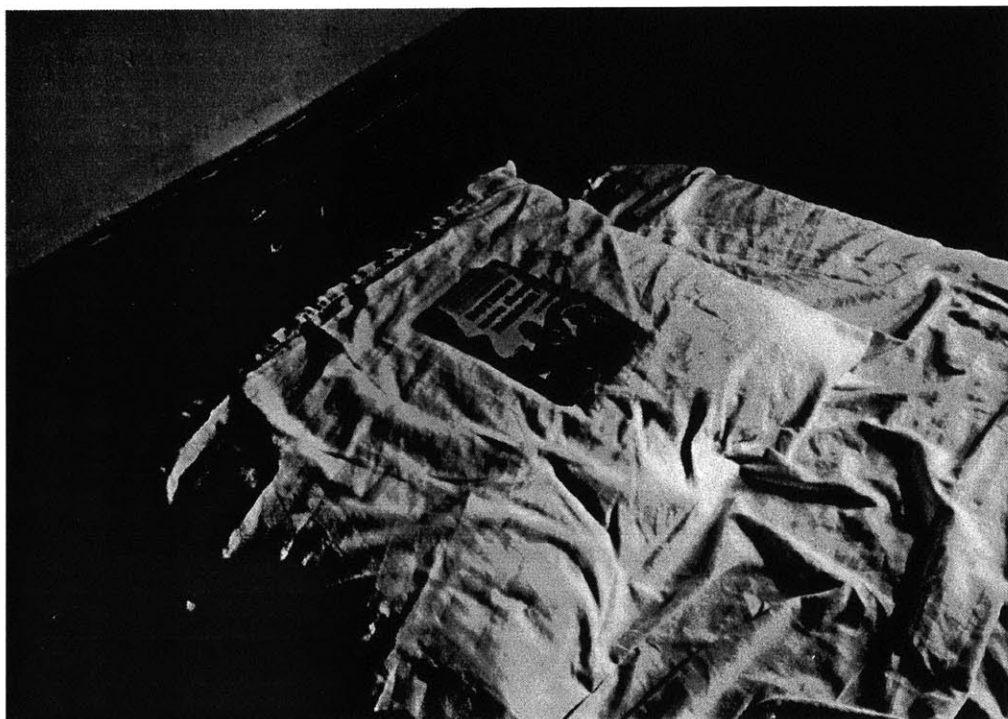
Chelsea Inn
184 West 11th avenue. NYC. 10011.

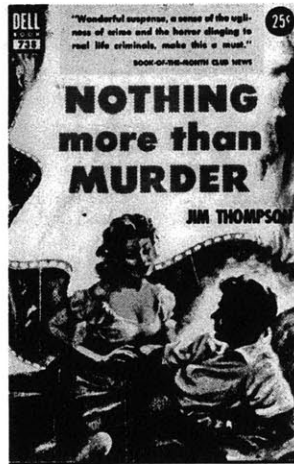


Jim Thompson. Nothing More Than Murder

the room is approximately 18' X 13'







Jim Thompson. *Nothing More Than Murder*
Dell Publishing Co. New York.

I ALWAYS STOP AT THE CRYSTAL ARMS when I'm in the city. They know I pay for what I get, and no questions, and whenever they can do me a favor they don't hold back.

There wasn't anything in my room box but a few complimentary theater tickets. I gave them to the bell captain and took the elevator upstairs. The heat was just being turned on full, and the room was a little chilly. I dragged a chair up to the radiator and sat down with my coat and hat on.

I wasn't worried. Not too much. I guess I just had a touch of the blues. I had everything in the world to look forward to, and I had the blues. I got out part of a pint I had in my Gladstone, and sat down again.

The lights were coming on, blobbing through the misty night haze that hung over the city. Over in the yards a freight gave out with a highball. I took a drink and closed my eyes. I tried to imagine it was fifteen years ago, and I was on the freight, and I was looking at the city for the first time. And I thought, *Hell, if you had to be blue why not then instead of now?*

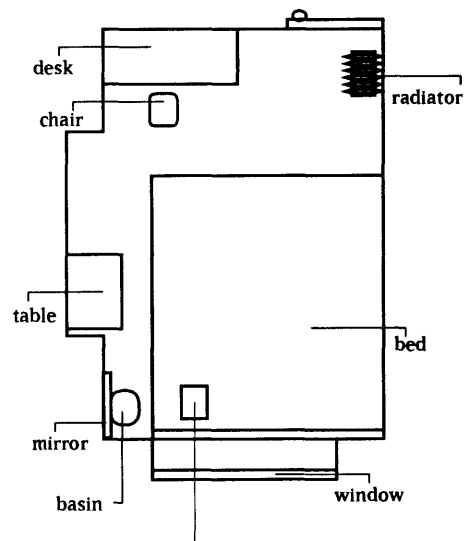
Cloudy afternoon reading in a hotel room. I'm sitting down paying no attention to the book but getting consumed watching cigarette smoke evaporates into the ceiling, and I started to imagine things.

Restless, I put the book down got out of the hotel ~~room~~ and walked and didn't know which way to go. My mind kept turning into several directions and amazed at all the possible directions you can take with different motives that come in, like, it can make a whole different story or something. But my body kept going straight, straight along the river.

Chance of something happen which at the time not significant at all but later becomes enough to change one's life in the end?

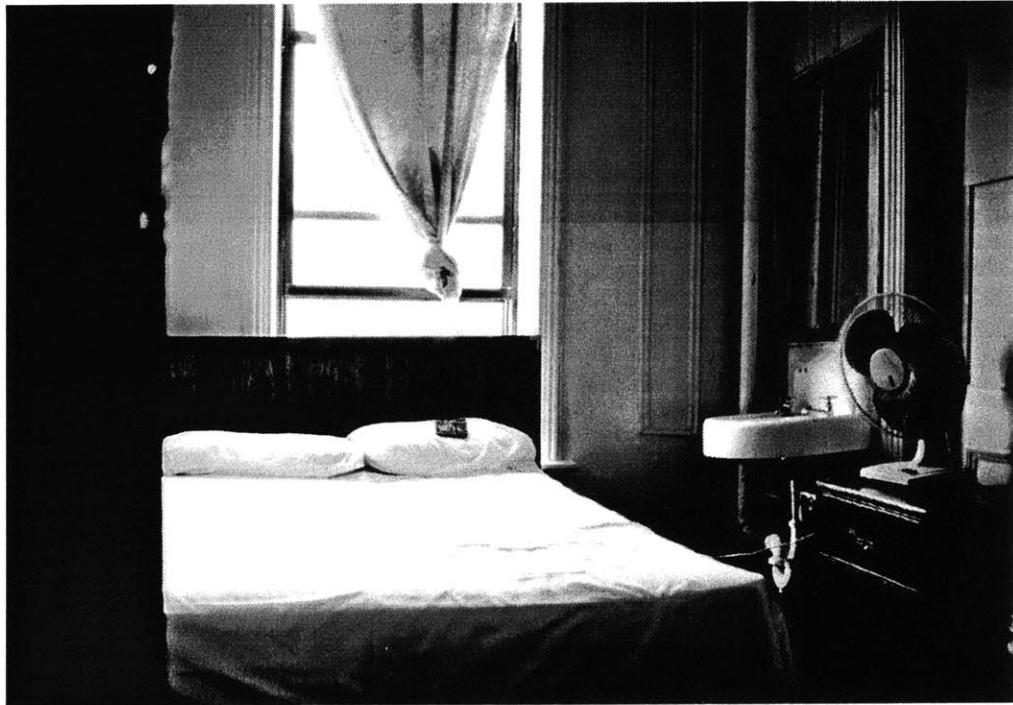
... what's in the store for me in the direction which I didn't take.

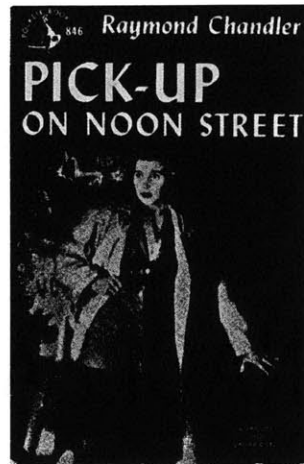
Sherman Hotel
392 West 47th street. NYC. 10036.



Raymond Chandler. Pick-Up on Noon Street
the room is approximately 12' X 7'







Raymond Chandler. *Pick-Up on Noon Street*.
Pocket Book. New York. 1952.

The Negro in the purple suit leaned across the counter and his teeth flashed in a quick, hard smile. He was very young, with a thin, sharp jaw, a narrow bony forehead, the flat brilliant eyes of the gangster. He said softly: "That pug with the husky voice still here? The guy that banked the crap game last night."

The bald-headed clerk looked at the flies on the ceiling fixture. "Didn't see him go out, Smiler."

"Ain't what I asked you, Doc."

"Yeah. He still here."

"Still drunk?"

"Guess so. Hasn't been out."

"Three-forty-nine, ain't it?"

"You been there, ain't you? What you wanta know for?"

"He cleaned me down to my lucky piece. I gotta make a touch."

The bald-headed man looked nervous. The Smiler stared softly at the green stone in the man's tiepin.

"Get rolling, Smiler. Nobody gets bent around here. We ain't no Central Avenue flop."

The Smiler said very softly: "He's my pal, Doc. He'll lend me twenty. You touch half."

He put his hand out palm up. The clerk stared at the hand for a long moment. Then he nodded sourly, went behind a ground-glass screen, came back slowly, looking toward the street door.

His hand went out and hovered over the palm. The palm closed over a passkey, dropped inside the cheap purple suit.

The sudden flashing grin on the Smiler's face had an icy edge to it.

"Careful, Doc — while I'm up above."

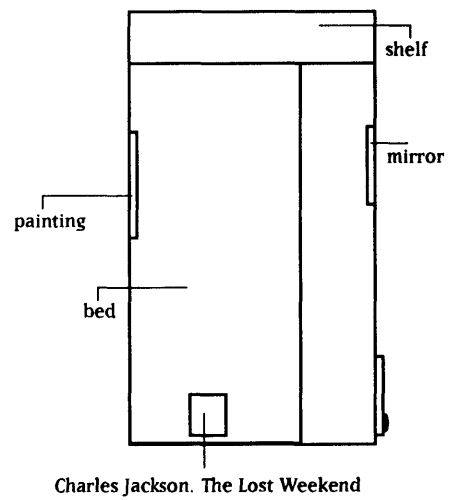
The clerk said: "Step on it. Some of the customers get home early." He glanced at the green electric clock on the wall. It was seven-fifteen. "And the walls ain't any too thick," he added.

The thin youth gave him another flashing grin, nodded, went delicately back along the lobby to the shadowy staircase. There was no elevator in the Surprise Hotel.

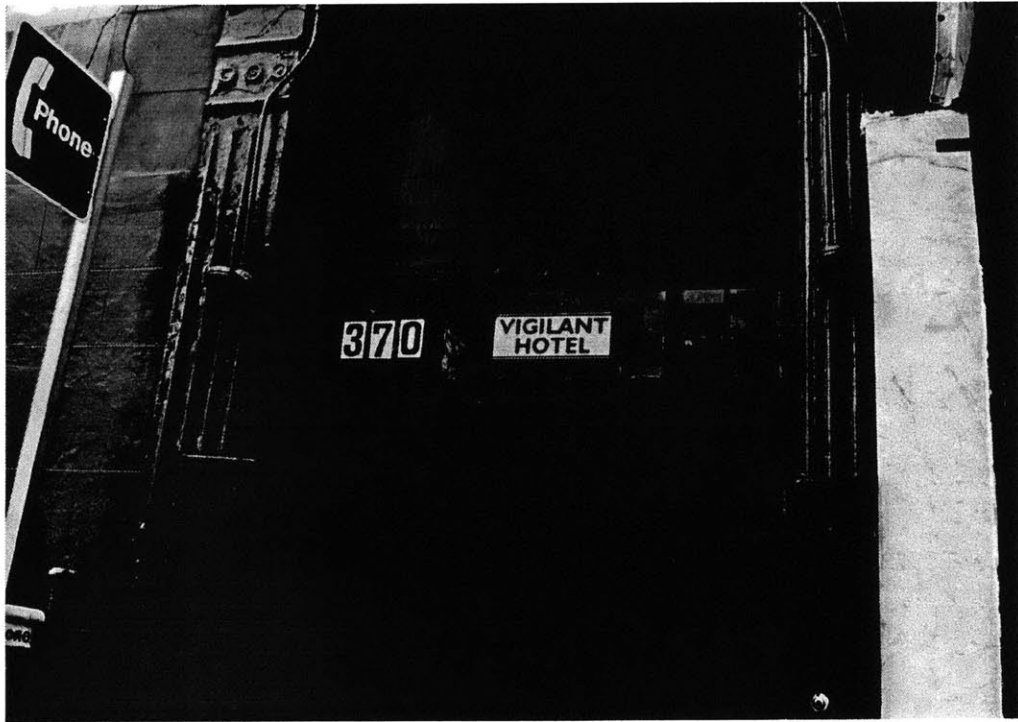
I sat motionless on the edge of the bed and looked down to the street from the only window in the room. The view from the window is what one might expect from Times Square, the usual fare. Hookers, hustlers, barkers, tourist.

Silence of the room seems to make the predictable actions more real and stylish than it really is.

Hotel Vigilant
370 8th avenue. NYC. 10001.



the room is approximately 4' X 7'







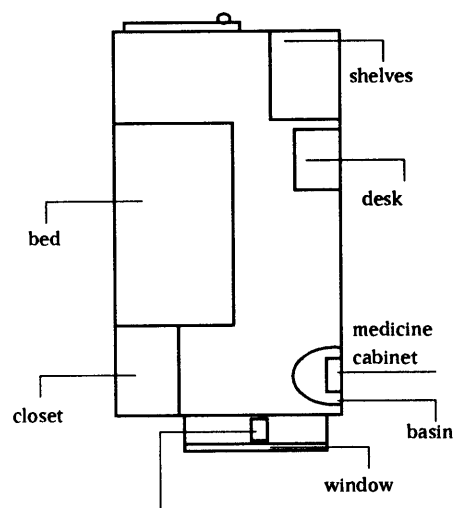
Charles Jackson. *The Lost Weekend*
Signet Books New York. 1948.

The windows were lighter now, the blue was white, it was morning. With a sinking heart he realized that the day was to start out like the dreaded Sunday after all. He was in for at least two hours of this, two more hours of waiting for the bar or the liquor store to open; for remorse or no, he meant to go on with it, the thing was in him now and must be finished. Wick was away for the long weekend, he'd be alone till Tuesday, he'd have his long weekend, here. A golden opportunity to go on his tear without interference, provided Helen didn't catch up with him or intercept him, provided he kept out of people's way, kept to himself and avoided seeing anyone he knew. For six days—for five more—he could move through the city at will, as he often had in the past, going here and there about the town like a ghost, unknown, unnoticed, like a man moving in a kind of time-out. A solo flight (flight indeed), unheeded by anyone because no one knew who he was (whoever stopped the anonymous drunk?); a flight that would last just long enough, for in his present weakened condition he knew that six days would be about the limit of his endurance. No three-week bender this time, ending up in Chicago, Philadelphia, the Fall River boat, a filthy room in a 9th Avenue hotel—God knows where.

He came from a rooming house in Brooklyn. He now lives in a room that is not even livable. There are no locks on the bathroom door, no curtains for the showers. He's gone to bathroom in the morning and look in the tub and there's shit in there. While he's sitting there you see a spike on the floor, blood on the wall.

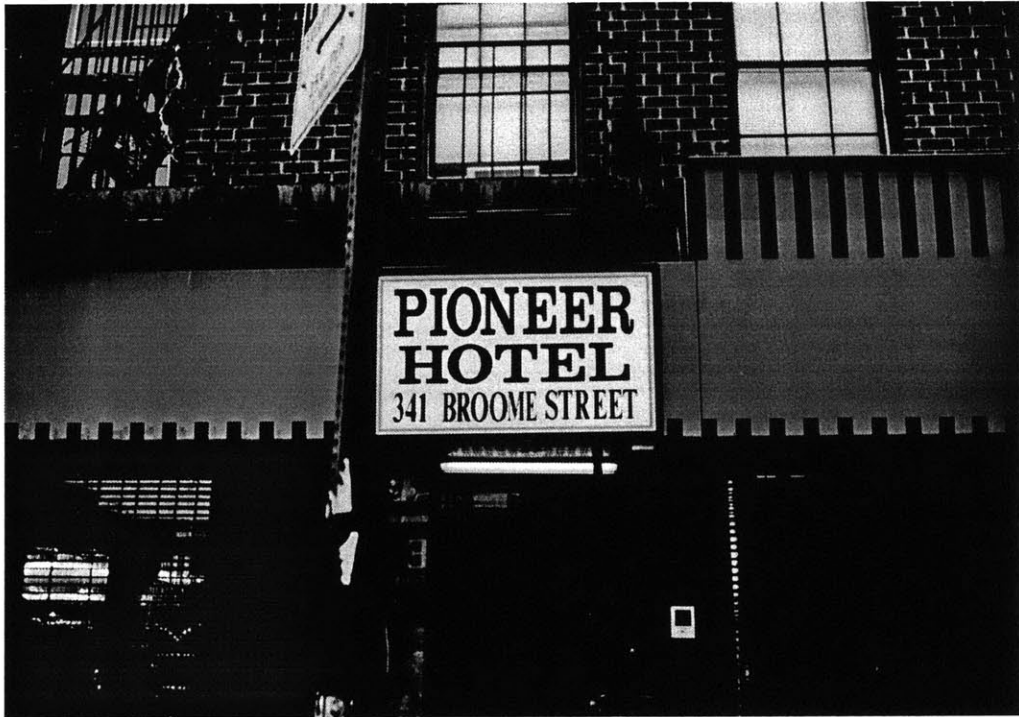
It took him four years on a methadone program to get off drugs. Now drinking is his problem. He drinks because he has to have a nerve. He has to have a ~~nerve~~ nerve because his girlfriend isn't with him all the time. He says he used to be a saxophone player. He's played with Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Oscar Brown, Jr. Nancy Wilson, Ramsey Lewis, Red Garland. "Miles wrote a song about me" he says. He doesn't play music anymore. "It done worked out of me"

Pioneer Hotel
341 Broome street. NYC. 10013.



Herbert Selby Jr. Last Exit to Brooklyn

the room is approximately 7' X 14'





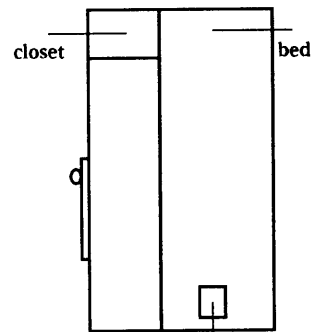


Herbert Selby JR. *Last Exit to Brooklyn*
Grove Press. New York. 1965

None of that shit. She waited, alone, in the Greeks. A doggie came in and ordered coffee and a hamburger. He asked her if she wanted something. Why not. He smiled. He pulled a bill from a thick roll and dropped it on the counter. She pushed her chest out. He told her about his ribbons. And medals. Bronze Star. And a Purpleheart with 2 Oakleaf Clusters. Been overseas 2 years. Going home. He talked and slobbered and she smiled. She hoped he didn't have all ones. She wanted to get him out before anybody else came. They got in a cab and drove to a downtown hotel. He bought a bottle of whiskey and they sat and drank and he talked. She kept filling his glass. He kept talking. About the war. How he was shot up. About home. What he was going to do. About the months in the hospital and all the operations. She kept pouring but he wouldn't pass out. The bastard. He said he just wanted to be near her for a while. Talk to her and have a few drinks. She waited. Cursed him and his goddamn mother. And who gives a shit about your leg gettin all shot up. She had been there over an hour. If he'd fucker maybe she could get the money out of his pocket. But he just talked. The hell with it. She hit him over the head with the bottle. She emptied his pockets and left. She took the money out of his wallet and threw the wallet away. She counted it on the subway. 50 bucks. Not bad. Never had this much at once before. Should've gotten more though. Listenin to all that bullshit. Yeah. That sonofabitch. I shoulda hit him again. A lousy 50 bucks and he's talkin like a wheel or somethin. She kept 10 and stashed the rest and hurried back to the Greeks.

by the way,
It makes me wonder sometimes,
From whom do people obtain
the extraordinary girth
they sometimes condescend
to lend? or share?
but not to you
... my impecunious friend.

Hotel Grand
145 Bowery street. NYC. 10002.



Manual J. Torres. Manny

the room is approximately 4x7







Manual J. Torres. *Manny*
Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston. 1977.

It never really dawned on me until then that if you hit connections they are going to try to wipe you out. But now I wake up to the fact that I better leave the vicinity. My welcome is really getting thin. I know that if I persist in hanging out in the Bronx that someone is going to blow me away. So I'm still hiding out in this old boiler room, just hustling enough to maintain a weak habit. Really sick most of the time and barely scoring enough to keep alive.

But I still have the gun, because that is my insurance. If things get too bad I can always use the gun to get money. I was hungry one day, really hungry. I hadn't had much of anything to eat for days. And I went into this little grocery store to steal something to eat. But I was so sick and spaced out that I couldn't even take care of business, and this clerk caught me in the act. He made a grab for me to try and hold me until the cops could come, but I got my gun out and threw down on him. Now I was committed. You know what I mean? They just froze, and I said, "All right, just stand there while I just take what I need." So I took it. I walked the clerk around and had him fill up a shopping bag full of cigarettes, candy, and stuff to eat. I got the money out of the till, made both clerks empty their pockets, and even

looked under the counter to see if they had any large bills stashed. I made the clerks go back and get in a walk-in freezer. Then I took out of there fast. I got me a hotel room not far away. I washed up, ate, scored some dope, and relaxed. I said, Okay, Manny, this is it. I'm going to steal what I need, take what I want, and to hell with it from now on.

I poured a drink and looked out the window at the hot and crowded Bowery street. Here I am too tired and too hot to think straight, people outside on the street taking it on stride. It sometimes makes me feel ashamed but I tell myself I'd never be able to work as hard as hard nor as good as they could or even if I could, it doesn't matter much because I would never take any of my time nor energy to do any of that.

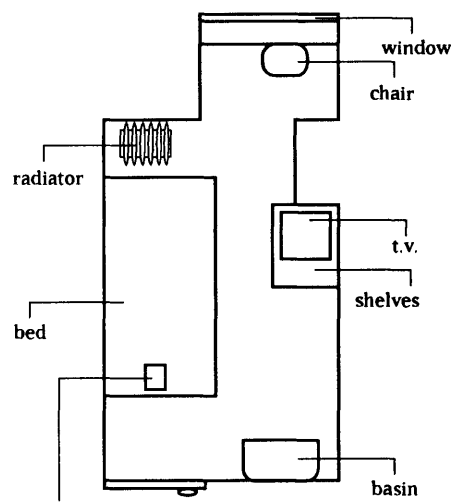
Death is next, death is always around the corner.

I finished the drink and tried to sleep. Sleep is always difficult. Sleep is always precursors.

Well, I thought, it's small and filthy but walls me still here. ~~Give a man four walls~~

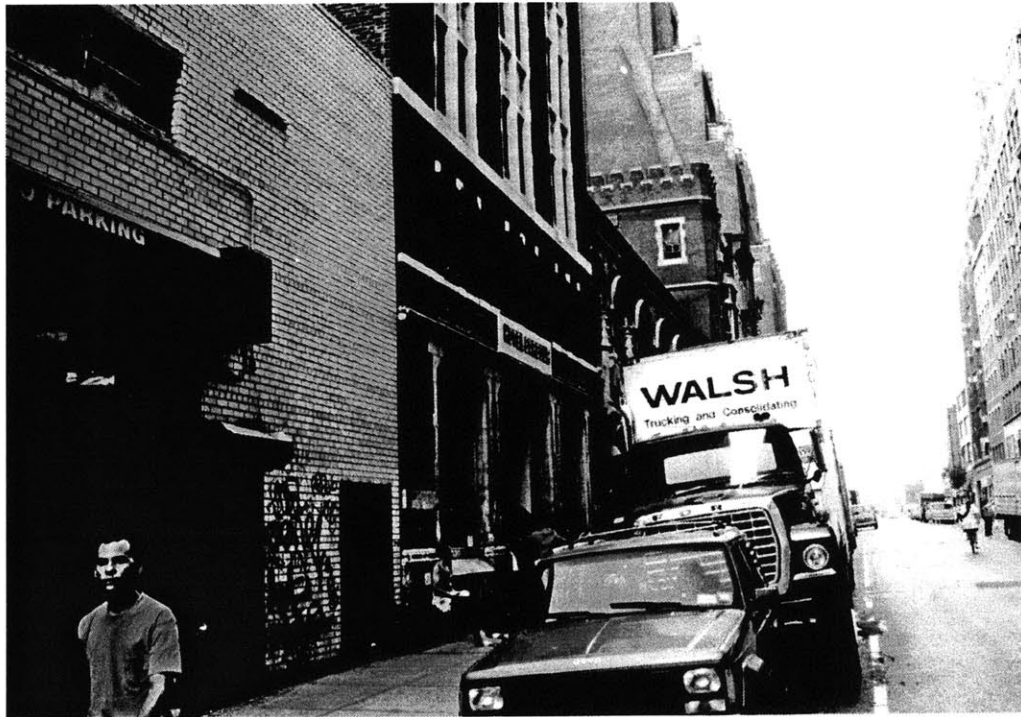
Give a man four walls and he has a chance. Out on the streets, nothing could be done.

Hotel Borbourn
330 West 36th street. NYC. 10018.

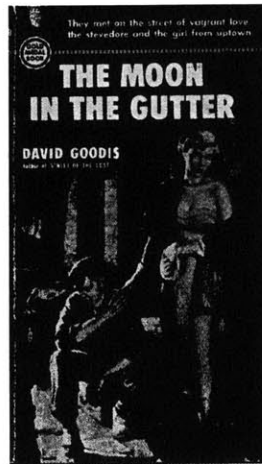


David Goodis. The Moon in the Gutter

the room is approximately 10' X 17'







David Goodis. *The Moon in the Gutter*
Gold Medal Books. New York. 1953.

He tried to drag his eyes away from the door, but even while making the effort he was putting his hand on the knob. He opened the door very slowly and went in and flicked the wall switch that lit the single bulb in the ceiling. He closed the door behind him and stood looking at the walls and the floor, the bed and the chair, the small dresser and tiny table. He was thinking of the girl who had lived here, the girl who'd been dead for seven months.

Without sound he spoke her name. Catherine, he said. And then he was frowning, annoyed with himself. It didn't make sense to sustain the sorrow. All right, she'd been his sister, his own flesh and blood, she'd been a fine sweet tenderhearted creature, but now she was gone and there was no way to bring her back. He tried to shrug it off and walk out of the room. But something held him there. It was almost as though he were waiting to hear a voice.

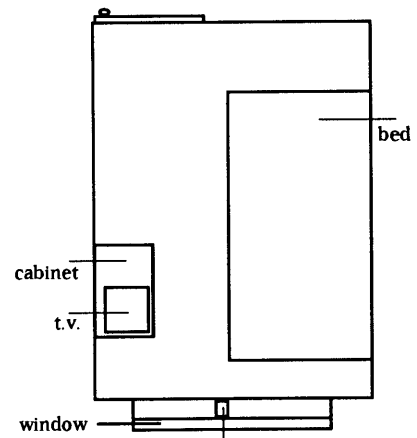
Then suddenly he heard it, but it wasn't a voice. It was the door. He turned slowly and saw Frank coming into the room.

When Frank had gone, Kerrigan took a long drag from the cigarette. He went on dragging at it until it was down to a stub that scorched his fingers. He hurled the stub to the floor and stepped on it.

Suddenly he felt smothered in here, And somehow it had nothing to do with the tobacco smoke that filled the room. He made a lunge for the doorknob, telling himself that he needed air.

Because I'm constantly looking for
story I'm always getting lost
in this world of nonchalant
and desperation. "The money
will come, probably later," the last
hope, a bottle on the ocean.
~~Kenmore~~ I remember Lina, Herbert's
transsexual coke connection, used to tell
me tales about Kenmore on 23rd st.
Then the Feds came, put greens in
the lobby round the clock.
"It made me feel safer than
petitioner" she said.

Star Hotel
330 West 30th street. NYC. 10001.

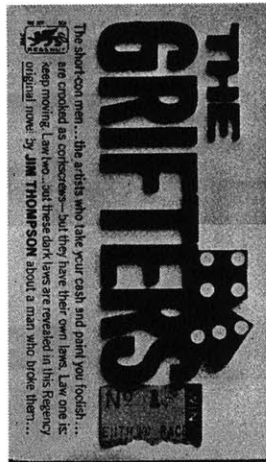


Jim Thompson. The Grifters

the room is approximately 12'X7'







Jim Thompson. *The Grifters*
Regency Books. Illinois. 1963.

At twenty-one, he was weary of the hit-and-get. He knew that the constant "getting"—jumping from one town to another before the heat got too hot—could absorb most of the hits, even of a thrifty man. So that he might work as hard and often as he safely could, and still wind up with the wolf nipping at the seat of his threadbare pants.

He piled the pillows on top of one another, and reclined in a half-sitting position. That seemed to be better, but tired as he was he was restless. With an effort, he reached his trousers from a nearby chair, and dug a quarter from the watch pocket.

Offhand, it looked like any other quarter, but it wasn't quite. The tail side was worn down, the head was not. Holding it back between the fleshy part of his first two fingers, hidden edgewise by them, he could identify the two sides.

He flipped it into the air, caught it and brought it down against his other hand with a *smack*. For this was the smack, one version of it. One of the three standard short-con gimmicks.

"Tails," he murmured, and there was tails.

He tossed the coin again, and called for heads. And heads came up.

He began closing his eyes on the calls, making sure that he wasn't unconsciously cheating. The coin went up and down, his palm deceptively smacking the back of his hand.

Heads . . . tails . . . heads, heads . . .

And then there was no smack.

His eyes closed, and stayed closed.

I always needed something to read in my
dusty hotel room so I started to collect
old paperbacks

I traveled from town to town accumulated
paperbacks ~~after~~

He carefully cleaned the paperbacks that
were covered with dust

The stacks and stack of white cardboard
box that contained the paperbacks in ~~the~~ my
hotel room sort of resembled fake jewel

Whenever I check out from a hotel
room I decided to leave one paperback

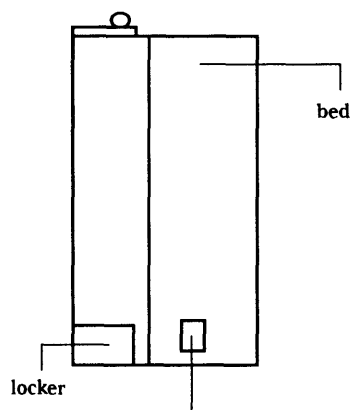
Every time I leave a paperback it
reminds me of the town I got the book
from and the room I stayed

I hear the guy next turn off his radio to
go to sleep

It is raining out side

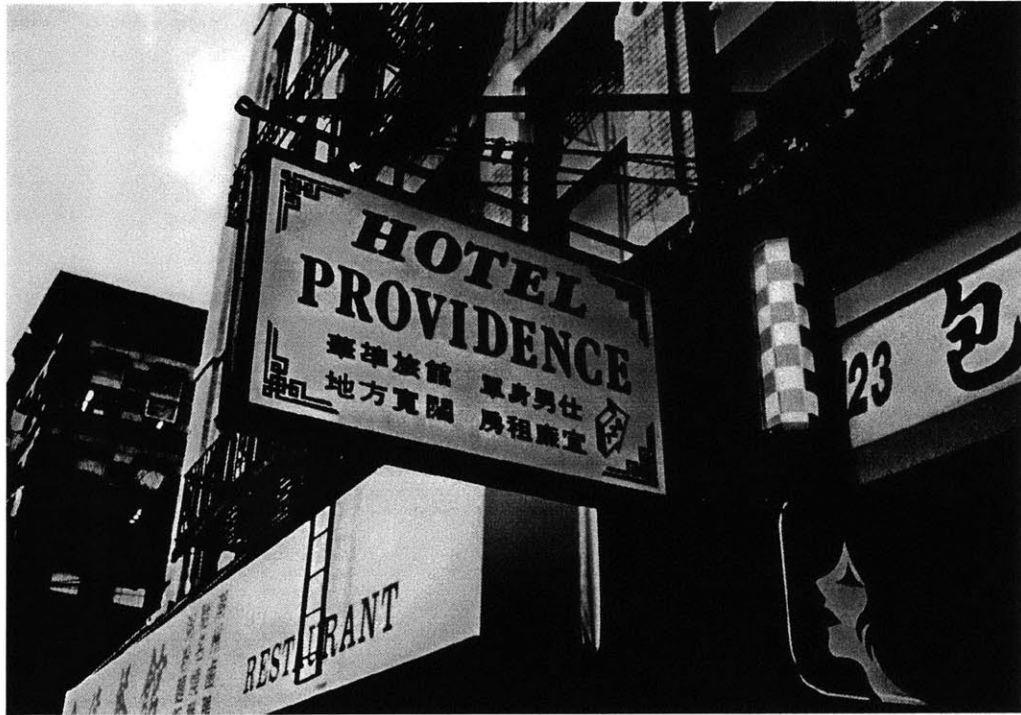
and I'm ready to check out

Providence Hotel
125 Bowery st. NYC. 10002.



Herbert Huncke. The Evening Sun Turned Crimson

th room is approximayely 4' X 7'







Herbert Huncke. *The Evening Sun Turned Crimson*
Cherry Valley Editions. New York. 1980.

I hadn't been in New York long when I met Eddie. When I first arrived I was stone broke and like every young kid who hits New York broke I went directly to 42nd Street. I hadn't known anything about 42nd Street but the name – nevertheless there I went – in no time becoming hip to the hustling routine – getting by fairly easily – meeting all kinds of people – having experiences I had never suspected possible.

At the corner of 8th Avenue and 42nd Street there used to be a notorious bar where petty crooks – fags – hustlers and people of every description hung out – known as the Bucket of Blood – although that wasn't the real name. Someone would say – “Man, I've got to cut out now – I'll pick you up later at the Bucket of Blood” – and you knew where he meant. I guess every city has its Bucket of Blood because I have run into several of them all over the country.

The first night following my release I went into the Bucket of Blood and met Eddie. I had been standing at the bar – looking the crowd over and nursing a glass of beer – when from out of nowhere he came over and spoke to me. He said “Hi – would you like to have a drink with me?”

We had another drink at the bar discussing what we would do if we did score. I told him – as he had guessed I was stone broke without even a place to sleep – had come into the joint intending to try and pick up a queen, score for some loot and get a place to stay. Eddie said not to worry about that – if I wanted to I could check into a hotel with him – he was planning to stay over in New York for a couple of days anyway – besides he liked me and this would give us an opportunity to get to know each other better – also he was anxious by now to get some stuff and get on. I had taken an immediate liking to Eddie and this plan suited me fine.

Creation of story is only a dream,
an illusion.

Creating story is like drawing water
by a container that has many holes.

Chasing a story that can't be captured
you write a story

but even you finish writing the last
page

a story isn't complete

Created story can never be your story

You can't say story is inside you

nor ~~that~~ you are inside story

You are not story,

story is not you.

Can we locate where does a story
reside

And, where do you reside

For some, your story is your history
and you are inside your story.

You almost believe there's untold
story inside you

and without this belief

there exist no life for a story teller

Only the act of writing through can
remain yours

Can we say this process of production
is a way to separate or distance
oneself from story, by story

This is the lone for story
a life of story teller
Life will be destroyed
face and fame will be lost
Memory will be erased
name will be erased

Even the work you've done
can't be immortal

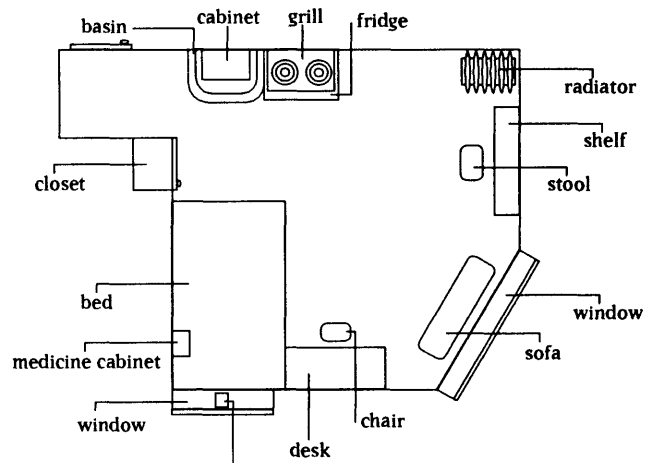
When there's no one left
and nothing left

this dream of creation will remain

Dreaming only about itself

the dream will never be put to
rest

BelleClaire Hotel
250 w77th street. NYC.



James Mills. The Panic in Needle Park

the room is approximately 15' X 15'







James Mills. *The Panic in Needle Park*
Signet Book. New York. 1967.

That night Helen went to work, looking for a John, and I took Bobby to a room I had rented in the Martell Hotel. We stood at the window and looked down on the flashing neon lights of Broadway. We watched Helen talking to a John in front of a drugstore a block away on 72nd Street. Helen and the John walked around the corner together and Bobby said, "They're going to the Talbot. He must have lots of loot 'cause that's a better hotel than these other places. Maybe he'll let her keep the room a while. I hope so 'cause she's really tired, you know, and she could use some sleep. I really wish I could do more for her. 'Cause like she really depends on me."

He sat down in a chair and started talking. He had shot up a *bombita* just before going to the room, and now he was all words. Speech flowed straight from his brain in a steady rush. Just as a paralytic's every step is twisted by his affliction, so every word Bobby spoke was colored by the symptoms of his disease—self-deception, immaturity, insecurity, guilt.

Early morning I'm remembering you,
It's been two weeks since you died
and I didn't even know about it till
now.

Wasn't I one of your friend?
I ~~never~~ knew you only for short
period of time but it was dense.
I became your room mate,
then became friend, a comrade,
then a stranger.
That made you hurt.
But you've never said anything that
hurt me.

I went separate way.

I haven't seen you for a while.
I heard you were sick.
I thought you just wanted to be alone
and didn't even visit you.
What was I trying to prove.
In the mean time, time has elapsed
And as a result,
I lost friend twice.

Memory is fragile.

It was stormy evening when I
talked to you for the first time.
What did we talk in boisterous
sound of storm?

The words don't come to my mind,
What vividly comes to my mind
is only the echo of your voice.
When I remember you,
your story doesn't echo.

You were a story teller.

Not only that, you tried to live
a life of storyteller.

You certainly loved story telling.

One could say you lived for it.

The stories once you adored when you
were young,

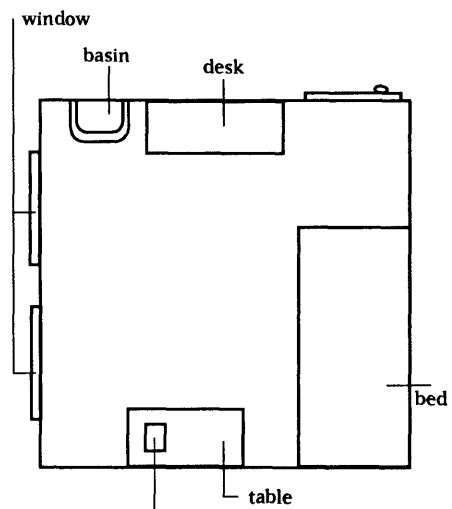
Had they ever stopped echoing inside you,

That earnest love,

where did it lead you?

Once the story becomes one's house,
Does it make one happy?

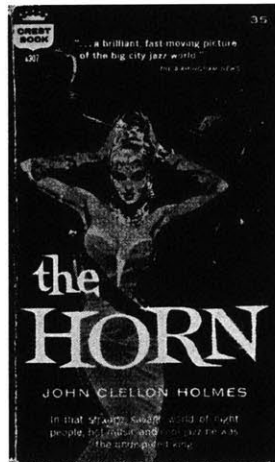
Hotel Evans
273 west 38 th street. NYC. 10018.



Jhon Clellon Holmes. The Horn
the room is approximately 11'X11'







John Clellon Holmes. *The Horn*
Crest Book. New York. 1959.

"I need fifty, Baby, so I can get straight . . . I been lushed all day," though she knew he was sober now. "You alone here? You wouldn't hide no one in the john from ol' Eddie though . . . Where's your dog?— But, you know, I never seen where you live before." And so he looked around.

It was one of those old bleak-corridorred hotels somewhere west of Times Square, in which the heavy carpets are worn thin, the rooms are dark, with large varnished wardrobes and standing lamps, and the ancient radiators bang and clank as the steam comes up, always too dry, too hot, and the lone bellboy is over forty. Edgar seemed amused by it.

"They think you white *enough*, I guess," he said, smirking as he slumped in the sagging armchair. "You got an extra forty or so?"

She turned to the window, unpleasantly hot, and threw it open, and looked out on the dim clotheslines webbed against the square of lowering dusk between the blank brick of neighboring buildings. It would rain soon, silently, steadily—lonesome autumn rain filling emptied ash cans. The air, already freshened by the showers moving over Jersey, almost chill, came in in a cool wave over her breasts as she leaned on the sill, and she automatically thought of Edgar, coatless, somewhere in the streets, and frowned.

"I just keep going till I make the fare," he had said with a curious crooked look. "I *got* to . . . I can sleep when I get home."

This room is dirty: the drawers in the desk are all gone and part of the ceiling is missing. The hotel has no security measures. Anybody can walk in the building whenever they want to. On my floor, there's 3 people sleeping on a hallway and one in the bathtub. The "clerk" told me he makes money by renting rooms to prostitutes. They want a room for five or ten minutes and he would make about \$300. He has to do it because landlord wouldn't pay his salary. Landlord has really let the building run down. But even though the building isn't fit to live in anymore, most of the tenants say they've become attached to the hotel and don't want to leave. I can understand that. It's hard getting up going somewhere else. Eventually, this place will be closed down, and they'll have to move out...

image credit

all photos and drawings by Taketo Shimada

...special thanks

Thanks first to mom and grandma, for giving me a birth, being my biggest fun and staying on me when I was messin' up.

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To iki for being there for me and kicking my ass.

Finally at last but not least extra special thanks to my other family, Herbert Huncke and Jason Pilarski, for making my life what it is, without them, I'm not here.

Peace to all the NYC single room occupants,

taketo shimada. february. 97.

